

the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 9601 *et seq.*, and its implementing regulations, 40 CFR chapter I, subchapter J, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, 42 U.S.C. 6901 *et seq.*, and its implementing regulations, 40 CFR chapter I, subchapter I;

(4) The Endangered Species Act of 1973, 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*, and its implementing regulations, 50 CFR chapter IV;

(5) The Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470aa *et seq.*) and its implementing regulations 36 CFR part 296;

(6) The Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, 30 U.S.C. 181 *et seq.*, the Mineral Leasing Act of Acquired Lands of 1947, 30 U.S.C. 351 *et seq.*, the Federal Oil and Gas Royalty Management Act of 1982, 30 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.*, and their implementing regulations, 43 CFR chapter II, group 3100; and

(7) Applicable Onshore Oil and Gas Orders and Notices to Lessees and Operators (NTL's) issued by the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management pursuant to 43 CFR chapter II, part 3160, subpart 3164.

(d) *Penalties.* If surface disturbing operations are being conducted that are not authorized by an approved surface use plan of operations or that violate a term or operating condition of an approved surface use plan of operations, the person conducting those operations is subject to the prohibitions and attendant penalties of 36 CFR part 261.

(e) *Inspection.* Forest Service officers shall periodically inspect the area of operations to determine and document whether operations are being conducted in compliance with the regulations in this subpart, the stipulations included in the lease at the direction of the Forest Service, the approved surface use plan of operations, the applicable Onshore Oil and Gas Order, and applicable Notices to Lessees, Transferees, and Operators.

#### **§ 228.113 Notice of noncompliance.**

(a) *Issuance.* When an authorized Forest officer finds that the operator is not in compliance with a reclamation or other standard, a stipulation in-

cluded in a lease at the direction of the Forest Service, an approved surface use plan of operation, the regulations in this subpart, the applicable onshore oil and gas order, or an applicable notice to lessees, transferees, and operators, the authorized Forest officer shall issue a notice of noncompliance.

(1) *Content.* The notice of noncompliance shall include the following:

(i) Identification of the reclamation requirements or other standard(s) with which the operator is not in compliance;

(ii) Description of the measures which are required to correct the noncompliance;

(iii) Specification of a reasonable period of time within which the noncompliance must be corrected;

(iv) If the noncompliance appears to be material, identification of the possible consequences of continued noncompliance of the requirement(s) or standard(s) as described in 30 U.S.C. 226(g);

(v) If the noncompliance appears to be in violation of the prohibitions set forth in 36 CFR part 261, identification of the possible consequences of continued noncompliance of the requirement(s) or standard(s) as described in 36 CFR 261.1b; and

(vi) Notification that the authorized Forest officer remains willing and desirous of working cooperatively with the operator to resolve or remedy the noncompliance.

(2) *Extension of deadlines.* The operator may request an extension of a deadline specified in a notice of noncompliance if the operator is unable to come into compliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the notice of noncompliance by the deadline because of conditions beyond the operator's control. The authorized Forest officer shall not extend a deadline specified in a notice of noncompliance unless the operator requested an extension and the authorized Forest officer finds that there was a condition beyond the operator's control, that such condition prevented the operator from complying with the notice of noncompliance by the specified deadline,

and that the extension will not adversely affect the interests of the United States. Conditions which may be beyond the operator's control include, but are not limited to, closure of an area in accordance with 36 CFR part 261, subparts B or C, or inaccessibility of an area of operations due to such conditions as fire, flooding, or snowpack.

(3) *Manner of service.* The authorized Forest officer shall serve a notice of noncompliance or a decision on a request for extension of a deadline specified in a notice upon the operator in person, by certified mail or by telephone. However, if notice is initially provided in person or by telephone, the authorized Forest officer shall send the operator written confirmation of the notice or decision by certified mail.

(b) *Failure to come into compliance.* If the operator fails to come into compliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in a notice of noncompliance by the deadline specified in the notice, or an approved extension, the authorized Forest officer shall decide whether: The noncompliance appears to be material given the reclamation requirements and other standards applicable to the lease established by 30 U.S.C. 226(g), the regulations in this subpart, the stipulations included in a lease at the direction of the Forest Service, an approved surface use plan of operations, the applicable Onshore Oil and Gas Order, or an applicable Notice to lessees, transferees, and operators; the noncompliance is likely to result in danger to public health or safety or irreparable resource damage; and the noncompliance is resulting in an emergency.

(1) *Referral to compliance officer.* When the operations appear to be in material noncompliance, the authorized Forest officer shall promptly refer the matter to the compliance officer. The referral shall be accompanied by a complete statement of the facts supported by appropriate exhibits. Apparent material noncompliance includes, but is not limited to, operating without an approved surface use plan of operations, conducting operations that have been suspended, failure to timely complete reclamation in accordance with an ap-

proved surface use plan of operations, failure to maintain an additional bond in the amount required by the authorized Forest officer during the period of operation, failure to timely reimburse the Forest Service for the cost of abating an emergency, and failing to comply with any term included in a lease, stipulation, or approved surface use plan of operations, the applicable onshore oil and gas order, or an applicable Notice to lessees, transferees, and operators, relating to the protection of a threatened or endangered species.

(2) *Suspension of operations.* When the noncompliance is likely to result in danger to public health or safety or in irreparable resource damage, the authorized Forest officer shall suspend the operations, in whole or in part.

(i) A suspension of operations shall remain in effect until the authorized Forest officer determines that the operations are in compliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the notice of noncompliance.

(ii) The authorized Forest officer shall serve decisions suspending operations upon the operator in person, by certified mail, or by telephone. If notice is initially provided in person or by telephone, the authorized Forest officer shall send the operator written confirmation of the decision by certified mail.

(iii) The authorized Forest officer shall immediately notify the appropriate Bureau of Land Management office when an operator has been given notice to suspend operations.

(3) *Abatement of emergencies.* When the noncompliance is resulting in an emergency, the authorized Forest officer may take action as necessary to abate the emergency. The total cost to the Forest Service of taking actions to abate an emergency becomes an obligation of the operator.

(i) Emergency situations include, but are not limited to, imminent dangers to public health or safety or irreparable resource damage.

(ii) The authorized Forest officer shall promptly serve a bill for such costs upon the operator by certified mail.

**§ 228.114 Material noncompliance proceedings.**

(a) *Evaluation of referral.* The compliance officer shall promptly evaluate a referral made by the authorized Forest officer pursuant to § 228.113(b)(1) of this subpart.

(b) *Dismissal of referral.* The compliance officer shall dismiss the referral if the compliance officer determines that there is not adequate evidence to support a reasonable belief that:

(1) The operator was not in compliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in a notice of noncompliance by the deadline specified in the notice, or an extension approved by the authorized Forest officer; or

(2) The noncompliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the notice of noncompliance may be material.

(c) *Initiation of proceedings.* The compliance officer shall initiate a material noncompliance proceeding if the compliance officer agrees that there is adequate evidence to support a reasonable belief that an operator has failed to come into compliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in a notice of noncompliance by the deadline specified in the notice, or extension approved by the authorized Forest officer, and that the noncompliance may be material.

(1) *Notice of proceedings.* The compliance officer shall inform the lessee and operator of the material noncompliance proceedings by certified mail, return receipt requested.

(2) *Content of notice.* The notice of the material noncompliance proceeding shall include the following:

(i) The specific reclamation requirement(s) or other standard(s) of which the operator may be in material noncompliance;

(ii) A description of the measures that are required to correct the violation;

(iii) A statement that if the compliance officer finds that the operator is in material noncompliance with a reclamation requirement or other standard applicable to the lease, the Secretary of the Interior will not be able to issue new leases or approve new transfers of leases to the operator, any

subsidiary or affiliate of the operator, or any person controlled by or under common control with the operator until the compliance officer finds that the operator has come into compliance with such requirement or standard; and

(iv) A recitation of the specific procedures governing the material noncompliance proceeding set forth in paragraphs (d) through (g) of this section.

(d) *Answer.* Within 30 calendar days after receiving the notice of the proceeding, the operator may submit, in person, in writing, or through a representative, an answer containing information and argument in opposition to the proposed material noncompliance finding, including information that raises a genuine dispute over the material facts. In that submission, the operator also may:

(1) Request an informal hearing with the compliance officer; and

(2) Identify pending administrative or judicial appeal(s) which are relevant to the proposed material noncompliance finding and provide information which shows the relevance of such appeal(s).

(e) *Informal hearing.* If the operator requests an informal hearing, it shall be held within 20 calendar days from the date that the compliance officer receives the operator's request.

(1) The compliance officer may postpone the date of the informal hearing if the operator requests a postponement in writing.

(2) At the hearing, the operator, appearing personally or through an attorney or another authorized representative, may informally present and explain evidence and argument in opposition to the proposed material noncompliance finding.

(3) A transcript of the informal hearing shall not be required.

(f) *Additional procedures as to disputed facts.* If the compliance officer finds that the answer raises a genuine dispute over facts essential to the proposed material noncompliance finding, the compliance officer shall so inform the operator by certified mail, return receipt requested. Within 10 days of receiving this notice, the operator may request a fact-finding conference on those disputed facts.